DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 178 SO 019 296

AUTHOR Regnery, Alfred S.
TITLE [Current Problems Encountered by American Youth: Delinquency, Crime, School Violence, School Discipline, and Related Matters.]
PUB DATE 15 Apr 85
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Conference on the Development of Civic Competence and Civic Responsibility (Irsee, West Germany, April 15-19, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Crime; *Delinquency; *Discipline Problems; Elementary Secondary Education; Juvenile Courts; *Schools; Student Problems; *Violence; *Youth Problems
IDENTIFIERS West Germany

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a broad overview of information about delinquency, crime, and school discipline and violence in relation to U.S. youths. Part 1 compares U.S. and West Germany's crime rates for 1980-1985, while part 2 focuses on U.S. juvenile crime facts and on the contribution of the increasing number of U.S. family breakdowns to juvenile crime problems. Part 3 describes young people as the most vulnerable victims of pornography, abuse, sexual molestation, and other crimes. Part 4 states that, while schools are particularly vulnerable to crime and lack of discipline, most crime-related school incidents are committed by a small percentage of students or by offenders who are not currently enrolled students. Part 5 identifies the U.S. juvenile justice court system's role. (JHP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED299178

[CURRENT PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY AMERICAN YOUTH:
DELINQUENCY, CRIME, SCHOOL VIOLENCE, SCHOOL DISCIPLINE, AND RELATED MATTERS.]

April 15, 1985

Office of Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention
Department of Justice
Conference on the Development of Civic
Competence and Civic Responsibility
Among Youth
Irsee, Germany

30 019 296

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
ALFRED S. REGNERY
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Paper Delivered by
Alfred S. Regnery
Administrator
Office of Juvenile Justice
and Delinquency Prevention
Department of Justice
Conference on the Development of Civic
Competence and Civic Responsibility
Among Youth
Irsee, Germany

April 15, 1985

I have been asked to discuss some of the current problems encountered by American young people having to do with delinquency and crime, school violence, school discipline, and related matters.

CRIME - A COMPARISION BETWEEN THE U.S. AND GERMANY

Crime in the United States exists, and has existed for a long time, to a degree which is probably incomprehensible to Western Europeans. It would thus be worthwhile, and would give a good indication of our crime problem to start by making comparisions between American and German crime rates.

During 1982 in the United States, there were 22,500 murders; there were 3,012 in Germany. There were 81,500 arrests for rape in the United States, as compared to 6,700 in Germany. Robberies were even more disproportionate. While there were 30,500 arrests in Germany, there were 574,000 in the United States. We had about 10 times as many arrests for aggravated assault as did the Germans, 67,000 in Germany as opposed to 643,000 in America. Burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft were somewhat less disproportionate: 11,900,000 arrests for such crimes were

made in the United States during that year, and 2,785,000 in Germany. For all of those serious crimes, which we call index crimes in the United States, there were thus a total of 13,290,000 arrests in the United States during 1982, and about 2,900,000 in Germany. If we divide the numbers of crimes between violent crimes, or those against persons, and property crimes, we find that we have much more violence in the United States than do the Germans, but that our property crime rates are more similar. Taking just the violent crimes, we find that there were more that 12 times as many arrests for such crimes in the United States than in Germany; compensating for the difference in populations, we found nearly 4 times as many arrests per hundred thousand people as did the Germans. The rates for property crimes, on the other hand, were only about one and a half times as high in the United States per hundred thousand population.

Those numbers are, of course, for all crimes, whether committed by adults or juveniles. Looking at juvenile crime rates in both countries, we also find some interesting trends. In the United States, for example, about 20% of all violent crimes are committed by juveniles, and about one-third of all property crimes. In Germany, on the other hand, juveniles commit about 14% of the violent crimes, and about 22% of the property crimes.

In comparing German and American crime, perhaps we Americans can take a certain amount of solace, despite our overwhelmingly larger crime rates, in the fact that crime in the United States is, generally, decreasing, while it is increasing in Germany. Particularly in the last three years, the American crime rate has gone down by 4 to 5 percentage points each year,

and was relatively stable between about 1980 and 1982. In Germany, on the other hand, the crime rate seems to increase fairly consistently by about 4 and 8 percent per year.

By the same token, the percentage of all crimes committed by juveniles in the United States has decreased, from about 40% to 33% of all serious crimes; in Germany, the overall percentage of crimes committed by juveniles appears to remain at a fairly consistent 15%.[1]

JUVENILE CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES

Let me now turn to a discussion of the American scene in terms of crime and delinquency. As I mentioned, about one-third of all of our serious crime is committed by juveniles. Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that as much as 80% of that crime is committed by a small number of offenders, probably not more than five or ten percent of the juvenile population. In 1982, there were 76,000 juveniles arrested for violent crime, and over 1.3 million juveniles arrested for all other crime. Almost 2000 juveniles are arrested for murder each year, 4000 for rape, and over 34,000 for aggravated assault. Those figures are, of course, only for arrests, not offenses.

As with most industrial societies, our most serious juvenile crime problem is with the chronic offender. Research in the area has been significant in recent years, and may give an idea of the magnitude of the

[1]The foregoing statistics were obtained from Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice, the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1983, and from Polizeilische Kriminalstatistik 1982, Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bundeskriminalamt, 1983).

chronic offender's victimization. About 10 years ago, University of Pennsylvania criminlogist Marvin Wolfgang carefully examined a base group of some 10,000 males born in Philadelphia in 1945, and Wolfgang discovered 627 young men who had collected five or more arrests prior to their eighteenth birthday. Less than 7% of the sample, they were responsible for nearly 70% of all crimes attributed to the 10,000.

Wolfgang has recently repeated his study, using 14,000 young men born in 1958, reared in the turbulent Sixties and Seventies and now in their mid twenties. Some things haven't changed — like the 7.5% considered chronic offenders. But what has changed has definitely changed for the worse. For instance, the second group studied accounted for 75% of reported rapes and robberies. Compared to their teenaged counterparts a generation ago, their offense rate per 1,000 virtually doubled for rape and aggravated assault. It nearly tripled for murder. It increased five-fold for robbery. In short, says Wolfgang, we have a very violent criminal group, a handful of brutal offenders who took to violence early in life and need to be controlled just as early.

Wolfgang's studies are not the only insights we have into the serious offender. Researchers from the Rand Corporation in California questioned some 2200 convicts in California, Michigan, and Texas prisons; they learned that while most prisoners acknowledged committing many more crimes than those for which they were convicted, a small fraction proved extraordinarily active in their law breaking careers. Half the burglars, for instance, averaged fewer than six offenses a year. But a minority of 10% reported more than 230 crimes annually. The pattern held true for robbery

as well, and was even more radically skewed when it came to drug dealing. There, half the offenders averaged 100 deals a year. But the upper tenth of the sample averaged over 3,200 yearly. The conclusion in inescapable that these adults were the same offenders first found as juveniles by Professor Wolfgang. Using his figures, it is possible to predict with 92% accuracy that after a third offense, a delinquent youth will go on to five or more arrests by age eighteen — with ten crimes unsolved for every arrest made.

Juvenile crime is only one of several symptoms of a disintegrating family structure in America. Half of all our marriages end in divorce. Half of the 13.5 million babies born each year to mothers between eighteen and twenty-four will be born to unmarried women, and 55% of all black babies are illegitimate. In the city of Chicago alone, 200,000 babies, or 30% of the total born last year, were illegitimate. It is estimated that 45% of the babies born in 1976 will be living with a single parent before they are 18 years old. Twenty years from now, half of all Americans will not have grown up in a solid, traditional family. There is little doubt that this family breakdown has contributed considerably to our juvenile crime problem.

VICTIMIZATION OF JUVENILES

Children are the most vulnerable victims of family breakdown, as well as victims of pornography, child abuse, and sexual molestation and crime generally.

First, it is believed that nearly 1.5 million children — noboby really

knows exactly how many — run away from home each year. All but about 10% or perhaps 150,000, ultimately return. Thousands of these children are never accounted for, and virtually all of them are in significant danger of physical, sexual or other criminal exploitation. For example, most juvenile prostitutes are runaways and missing from home: the New York City Police Department estimates that 90% of the runaways apprehended by that department's runaway unit have been involved at one time or another in prostitution. Other estimates indicate that up to one million children — some as young as six months old — have been used in homosexual and heterosexual pornographic pictures and films. The child pornography market is estimated by researchers to account for nearly $1 billion of the $2 to 4 billion pornography business.

Younger people in the United States are much more often the victims of crime than are any other age group. For both violent crimes and property crimes, those 12 to 19 years of age are nearly four times as likely to be victimized as those over 35 years of age. Blacks, as well as people with lower incomes, are also more likely to be victimized than are whites or people with higher incomes. Murder remains the most likely cause of death for black males under 25 in the United States, to the extent, in fact, that the murder rate for that age group is of epidemic proportions.

The good news, and the flipside of the chronic offender problem, is the fact that most American children do not get into trouble, and the fact that most children who do, do so only once and are then not seen by the justice system again. In the Philadelphia studies I mentioned earlier, only about 600 out of 10,000 juveniles had been arrested five times or more, and

although about three times that many had been arrested once, most of those were not arrested a second time. So nearly three-quarters of all the juveniles had never had any contact with the justice system at all. Disorder created by that small group, however, is of considerable magnitude, and is an issue of considerable concern to policymakers, legislators, those within the justice system, and to the public at large.

CRIME AND DISCIPLINE IN THE SCHOOLS

We do have a considerable crime problem within our schools in the United States, as well as a problem with discipline generally; although the two are related and are often synonymous, they do differ, and must be dealt with in a different way. Although most students do not engage in criminal activity within the schools, and while most do not present more than the ordinary disciplinary problems of growing up, a relative few students are sufficiently disruptive as to create a considerable problem for the rest of the students, and for education generally.

A comprehensive survey was done of school discipline in 1978 by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, at the request of the Congress. That study,[2] found that about one-fourth of all schools in the country were vandalized in a given month and 10% were burglarized, that about 2.4 million secondary school students had something stolen and about 282,000 reported being attacked during a typical month; that about 120,000 secondary school teachers had something stolen each month and 6000 had

[2]Entitled "Violent Schools - Safe Schools: The Safe School Study Report to Congress, in 1978."

something taken by force, weapons or threats, and that about 40% of all robberies and 36% of all assaults on urban students occurred while they were at school. Another study, recently done by the National Parent Teacher Association, observed that the annual cost of vandalism — about $600 million per year, exceeds the nation's total expenditure for textbooks.

Although another study of the magnitude of the Safe School Study has not been done since 1978, estimates of the National Federation of Teachers, a large teachers union, as well as by a number of students of the subject estimate that the rate of school crime is approximately the same, or perhaps a little bit improved, over 1978.

There has been considerable debate in the United States about the quality of our public school system in recent years — a debate which I will not reiterate here, as I believe it will probably be raised during the course of this conference. Suffice it to say that a major part of that debate has been general agreement of the importance of an orderly environment to learning. In a major report to the nation on education[3] stated unequivocally that improved discipline is a prerequesite for improving our nation's schools. Similarly, a bipartisan merit pay task force of the U.S. House of Representives cited improved discipline as essential to upgrading the quality of teachers and teaching. In fact, there is little debate that educational excellence cannot be achieved without order, and that

[3]A study commissioned by the Department of Education entitled "A Nation at Risk ... The Imperative for Educational Reform" in 1983.

discipline of students is an integral part of their education generally, and of quality education in particular.

Although the numbers, in themselves, are shocking, it is important to remember that most incidents of crime in the schools are committed by a relatively small percentage of the students. In addition, many of the offenders are not students at all but intruders into the school systems, a problem particularly acute in large, urban schools.

Nevertheless, there is little question that schools are particularly vulnerable to crime and lack of discipline: it does not take more than a few students who choose to victimize their school and their fellow students to cause major disruption to a school system. Students who wish to get an education pay the price by not being able to learn.

JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Before closing, let me describe briefly the justice system in the United States as it pertains to juveniles.

We have a separate court system in the United States for juveniles (generally those under 18, although it differs state by state) which was established in 1899 under the theory that juvenile were incapable of determining the difference between right and wrong, and therefore could not be held accountable for their offenses. Although the system has changed considerably during the last 85 years, it still exists and, according to some, is one of the factors that contributes to our juvenile crime and delinquency problem.

The system does hold offenders more accountable than it did when it was founded, although it may not find people "guilty", but "adjudicates them delinquent", and has the ability, at least in theory, only to "treat" offenders rather than punish them. In fact, the system does punish, or hold offenders accountable, to a greater degree than it once did, although it cannot, for the most part, impose more than an indefinite or indeterminate sentence on offenders.

The juvenile justice system is under considerable attack, and has been for the last 20 years or so, and is undergoing what is often described as its most serious revolution at the present time. Frustrated by its inability to control juvenile crime, many state legislatures have made important changes to the system in recent years, but those changes only come with great controversy and after intense legislative battles. It is probabaly safe to predict that the juvenile system will undergo many more changes over the coming decade, perhaps even to the extent that it will become simply another criminal justice system.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that most of our crime, delinquency, and school disruption problems are caused by a relative few, but that those relative few cause a disproportionate amount of concern and disruption. Many changes are being made in the way we deal with that problem, although none of us are so optimistic as to believe that we will be able to do more than moderately reduce the rate of such crime at best. Having been a student at a German school myself, and something of a student of German culture and society, I will be interested in hearing of your comparable German problems, and how you go about dealing with them.